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NEWS

FROM THE U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES

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RESPONDING TO THE RWANDA CRISIS: DECLARE GENOCIDE, AND OTHER POLICY STEPS

Effective policy requires a proper understanding of the root causes of the violence in Rwanda. The U.S. media have generally mischaracterized Rwanda's massacres as amorphous, uncontrollable "tribal violence" that Westerners cannot possibly understand or affect. Other reports mistakenly imply that the huge numbers of deaths are due to crossfire in the civil war between the government army and the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

It is important to understand that the slaughter in Rwanda was planned and consciously triggered by a privileged clique of extremist political and military leaders there who are determined to block political reforms that would loosen their exclusive grip on power. The killings are a massive effort to sabotage an historic peace agreement, signed last year, that put the country on the road toward democratic reforms and a multi-ethnic, coalition government. No independent observers have accused the RPF rebels or ethnic Tutsis of involvement in shooting down the plane of President Habyarimana on April 6. The Rwandan interim government now asserts that Belgian soldiers were responsible.

Rwandan government soldiers, and youth militias connected to hardline political parties, have committed the overwhelming majority of the estimated 200,000 killings against defenseless civilians. The youth militias and the government army, composed of ethnic Hutus, massacred hundreds of politically moderate Hutus before turning their weapons against the country's ethnic Tutsi population. The staggering massacre of Tutsis appears to be an organized, calculated attempt to erase all possibility of ever forming a multi-ethnic, broad-based political system.

USCR suggests that U.S. and UN policies should respond to four areas needing urgent attention:

- A - Restore Order and Protection for Rwandan Civilians
- B - Demand Accountability for Massacres
- C - Isolate Rwanda's Interim Government
- D - Provide Humanitarian Assistance

A • Restore Order and Protection for Rwandan Civilians

1-A • Make Official Declaration That Genocide Is Occurring in Rwanda

USCR urges the U.S. and UN to declare formally that the massacres in Rwanda constitute genocide as defined in international law. This declaration is an important step necessary for establishing the moral, legal, and political context for forceful action by the international

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community. The international Genocide Convention of 1951 legally requires the international community to take action "appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide."

Rwandan Tutsis numbered an estimated 1 million to 1.5 million. Reports indicate that some 200,000 Rwandan Tutsis have been massacred since early April. This means that as many as 20 percent of the entire Rwandan Tutsi population has perished in the past month, primarily at the hands of government troops and militias aligned with extremist political parties. It is likely that the body count will increase as impartial observers gain access to additional parts of the country. The international Genocide Convention legally obliges the world community to intervene to stop genocide or to provide refuge to the victims and safe transit out of their life-threatening situation.

2-A • Re-Entry of International Peacekeeping Troops Needed

USCR urges the U.S. to take the diplomatic and financial lead in the UN to return international peacekeeping troops to Rwanda under the auspices of the UN or the Organization of African Unity (OAU). At this stage, UN or OAU troops cannot be expected to stop the war between RPF and government soldiers. However, urge that peacekeeping troops be given sufficient legal and military power to establish safety zones for endangered civilians and to protect humanitarian assistance efforts.

The U.S. strongly supported the UN Security Council's misguided decision two weeks ago to withdraw some 2,200 UN peacekeeping troops from Rwanda, thereby exposing tens of thousands of additional persons to slaughter. Only a token force of some 270 peacekeeping troops is now authorized to remain in Rwanda. UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali is now pushing the UN Security Council to re-insert peacekeeping troops, but his efforts have not yet succeeded.

RPF rebel leaders have announced they would "categorically oppose" a peacekeeping force, in part because the RPF is concerned that the presence of international troops might prevent the RPF from militarily defeating government troops. The UN should make clear to RPF leaders that the role of a peacekeeping force would be to protect civilians and relief efforts, not to protect or legitimize the self-proclaimed interim government. Any peacekeeping contingent should exclude troops from France, Belgium, Uganda, or Zaire due to those countries' previous involvement in Rwanda's internal politics.

3-A • Keep Borders Open for Rwandan Refugees

USCR urges that the U.S. work to ensure that Rwanda's borders with the neighboring countries of Tanzania (to the east), Burundi (to the south), Zaire (to the west), and Uganda (to the north) remain open so that Rwandan civilians can flee to safety.

Rwandan government soldiers have reportedly blocked many Rwandans from reaching Burundi, and both government and RPF rebel troops have been cited in press reports as sealing sections of Rwanda's border with Tanzania. The RPF denies that it has closed the Tanzania border. Other reports suggest that Tanzania allegedly closed its border to Rwandan refugees for several days. If true, these various impediments have trapped hundreds of thousands of Rwandans who are desperately trying to escape.

If diplomatic efforts do not ensure open borders, the U.S. should provide financial and logistical help so that the international community can supply troops to patrol Rwanda's border areas.

4-A • International Security Protection Needed at Refugee Camps

USCR urges the U.S. to push the UN and OAU to provide strong international protection

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for refugees fleeing to Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire. The U.S. should give diplomatic and logistical support to help initiate protection for refugee camps in asylum countries.

Rwandan refugees who manage to reach asylum in neighboring countries are still in danger. Two asylum countries—Burundi and Zaire—have endured their own recent violence, and heavy violence is reported along the Rwanda-Tanzania border. Since Rwanda is a small country, its violence can readily spill across borders, and Rwandan refugees are never far from renewed attacks.

Special international protection along border areas and security for Rwandans at refugee camps are particularly important if international peacekeeping troops do not re-enter Rwanda.

5-A • Jam Radio Broadcast in Kigali

USCR urges the U.S. to use immediately its technical capability to "jam" the radio broadcasts of Radio Milles Collines, which Rwandan extremists have used to disseminate their racist, hate-filled violence. In recent days this radio station has broadcast messages to the militias and to the public exhorting them to accelerate the slaughter. U.S. military personnel have told USCR that the U.S. military has the ability to jam these broadcasts almost immediately. Ending these broadcasts would be extremely helpful and would be a strong signal to extremists leaders in Rwanda that the international community is serious about curbing their actions.

6-A • Temporary Safe Haven for Rwandans and Burundians in U.S.

USCR urges U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno to grant immediately Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Rwandan and Burundian nationals currently in the United States.

Federal law empowers the Attorney General to grant temporary safe haven to foreign nationals in the United States when armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary situations in their home country would "pose a serious threat" to their return. Rwanda meets these criteria, and neighboring Burundi remains unsafe after wholesale massacres late last year.

Many of the estimated 1,000 or fewer Rwandans and the 500 or fewer Burundians currently in the United States are college students rapidly nearing the expiration of their student visas as the U.S. school year ends. Many of them would legally be obliged to depart the United States when their visas expire. Therefore, a prompt declaration of TPS is crucial to protect them.

A declaration of TPS by the Attorney General would apply only to Rwandan and Burundian nationals who are already in the United States. TPS is usually provided for one-year periods.

Having mounted a successful effort to evacuate all Americans from Rwanda in mid-April, it would be unconscionable for the United States to push Rwandans back into those same life-threatening dangers. Granting TPS in June or July might be too late for many Rwandan and Burundian students. Granting TPS should be an easy policy step for U.S. officials, but they have not yet done it.

B • Demand Accountability for Massacres

7-B • Begin Immediate UN Investigation into Massacres

USCR urges the UN Security Council to launch an immediate investigation into the massacres in order to ensure that individual political and military leaders in Rwanda are brought to

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account for their plans and actions. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights should conduct the investigation in collaboration with other international human rights experts. USCR urges the U.S. to push for the rapid beginning of this investigation with sufficient staff and resources.

History suggests that extremist political and military officials in Rwanda are accustomed to killing and inciting violence with impunity. The world community should move immediately to begin collecting evidence on the ground in Rwanda to impose accountability and bring individuals to justice.

Officials of the RPF rebels have indicated to the U.S. Committee for Refugees that the RPF is willing to allow international human rights investigators full access to RPF-controlled territory to begin their investigations immediately. The UN should seize this opportunity. Under no circumstances should a UN investigation be delayed, nor should an investigation be contingent on authorization by the self-proclaimed interim government of Rwanda. The "interim government" lacks legitimacy and is composed of several individuals who are themselves highly suspect in the massacres.

UN human rights investigations are too often undermined by poor financing and inadequate staffing. It is important that the UN field a large, highly qualified, well-coordinated investigative team that is empowered to investigate aggressively in Rwanda.

8-B • U.S. Should Identify and Condemn Leaders of Massacres

USCR urges U.S. officials to identify publicly the names of military and political leaders in Rwanda who are implicated in the massacres. U.S. officials already have access to this information. Immediate U.S. condemnation of specific individuals would send a strong signal to Rwandan hardliners that the world is aware of their complicity. This step might persuade Rwandan extremists to cease their genocidal activities.

9-B • Push RPF Rebels to Cooperate With Human Rights Workers

No neutral international observers have accused the Rwanda Patriotic Front of participating in massacres during the past month. The RPF, which currently controls at least half of Rwanda, should be encouraged to maintain the discipline of its troops, abide by internationally recognized rules of human rights, and honor its pledge to cooperate fully with human rights investigators of the UN and other agencies. The RPF should imprison captured government soldiers and members of extremist militia groups that have perpetrated the massacres of the past month. Imprisonment, rather than execution, of individuals who participated in the massacres will facilitate interrogations by human rights workers attempting to document the roots of the massacre. Individuals guilty of participating in the massacres can be brought to justice in proper fashion at the conclusion of investigations.

C • Isolate Rwanda's Interim Government

10-C • Classify Rwanda's Interim Government As Illegitimate

USCR urges the U.S. and UN to refrain from granting official diplomatic recognition to the so-called "interim government of Rwanda." The government contains numerous hardline leaders whose roles in President Habyarimana's assassination and in the massacres are highly suspect. The officials declared themselves the "interim government" after the country's president,

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prime minister, and other officials in line for leadership were assassinated in the first days of violence.

11-C • U.S. Should Separate Its Policies from the Policies of France

USCR urges U.S. officials to exert diplomatic leadership on the Rwandan crisis and to craft a policy independent of French policies.

U.S. officials typically regard Rwanda, a former Belgian colony, as being in the French and Belgian sphere of influence. U.S. foreign policy traditionally has looked to France for leadership on Rwandan issues. France, however, is heavily enmeshed in Rwanda's internal politics. France has tended to support the political and economic status-quo in Rwanda, and French policies have often been counterproductive to democratic reforms. France cannot be relied upon as a neutral mediator or peacekeeper in Rwanda.

American officials have long used France's primacy in Rwanda as an excuse for passive U.S. policies. This should change.

D • Provide Humanitarian Assistance

12-D • U.S. Should Immediately Provide Emergency Funding for Assistance to Refugees

USCR urges the U.S. to draw funds immediately from the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) fund for use in bringing relief to the growing numbers of Rwandan refugees. The ERMA fund exists for sudden refugee emergencies exactly like the crisis in Rwanda. Drawdowns from the \$50 million ERMA account require a Presidential directive.

Rwandan refugees who have reached the remote border area of Tanzania face a dire shortage of food and shelter. An expensive international food airlift may be necessary. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross must receive quick and substantial funds from the U.S. ERMA account to address massive emergency needs.

13-D • Immediate Humanitarian Assistance Inside RPF-Controlled Areas

USCR urges the UN and U.S. to provide humanitarian assistance wherever possible inside Rwanda, including in RPF-controlled areas.

Violence has understandably hampered relief efforts in Rwanda, but some regions controlled by the RPF are accessible. Concerns about international protocol and diplomatic niceties should not be used as an excuse to curtail relief. Delivery of humanitarian relief should not be contingent on receiving official permission to do so from the interim government of Rwanda. Questions of territorial sovereignty should not be allowed to delay desperately needed assistance inside Rwanda.

14-D • Urge RPF Cooperation With Relief Efforts

Officials of the Rwandan Patriotic Front have stated to the U.S. Committee for Refugees that the RPF is willing to cooperate fully with relief efforts in its area. RPF officials have also told USCR that the RPF is willing to permit UN or Red Cross relief convoys to pass through rebel lines and into southern areas of the country. This would allow relief agencies to launch large-scale relief efforts along good roads from Uganda.

The RPF should be encouraged to abide by its pledge of cooperation.

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